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ABSTRACT

This literature review examined the practical application of uncertainty reduction by describing how employment interview behaviors inform existing theory. The review cites C. R. Berger and R. J. Calabrese (1975) whose research proposes that strangers gather information to increase predictability or explanation of each other's behavior. F. M. Jablin (1987), whose research suggests that the interview serves as a job preview that helps applicants prepare to enter an organization is also cited. The first section of the literature review summarizes what is known about communication behaviors within the interview. The second part describes anticipatory socialization and how it relates to the employment interview. The third section examines uncertainty reduction in detail and shows how this interpersonal communication theory is useful for explaining interviewing behaviors. The final part offers suggestions for both interviewers and applicants. It is concluded that uncertainty reduction theory and anticipatory socialization research generally suggest a more balanced, conversational interaction that provides an exchange of accurate information concerning the organization, interviewer, and applicant. Contains 59 references. (Author/NKA)

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# The Employment Interview: Applying Perspectives of Uncertainty Reduction and Anticipatory Socialization

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# THE EMPLOYMENT INTERVIEW: APPLYING PERSPECTIVES OF UNCERTAINTY REDUCTION AND ANTICIPATORY SOCIALIZATION

## Abstract

This paper examines the practical application of uncertainty reduction and anticipatory socialization by describing how employment interview behaviors inform existing theory. Berger and Calabrese (1975) propose that strangers gather information to increase predictability or explanation of each other's behavior. Jablin (1987) suggests that the interview serves as a job preview that helps applicants prepare to enter an organization. The first section of this literature review summarizes what is known about communication behaviors within the interview. A description of anticipatory socialization follows and how it relates to the employment interview. The third section examines uncertainty reduction theory in detail and shows how this interpersonal communication theory is useful for explaining interviewing behaviors. The final section offers suggestions for interviewers and applicants. Uncertainty reduction theory and anticipatory socialization research generally suggest a more balanced, conversational interaction that provides an exchange of accurate information concerning the organization, interviewer, and applicant.

Few people would disagree that the employment interview is an important part of the selection process. Several literature reviews summarizing research support this claim (Arvey & Campion, 1982; Jablin & McComb, 1984; Schmitt, 1976). However, two major problems exist within this area of study. One concern is that many researchers and practitioners do not fully understand the interview process. They are unknowingly distributing misinformation that could lead to employees' high expectations, disappointment, and later turnover (Jablin & Krone, 1987; Posner, 1981; Wanous, 1980). In order to prevent this, more needs to be known about the employment interview in general (Goodall & Goodall, 1982; Jablin, 1987; Jablin & Miller, 1990).

The second problem involves the need for more research that is guided by communication principles. Many interview studies focus on communication-related behaviors. Jablin and McComb (1984) found that 57% of the research performed between 1976 and 1982 examined communication variables. Literature reviews repeatedly call for more of this orientation but fail to provide "sufficient theoretical and empirical guidance to stimulate research" (Jablin & McComb, 1984, p. 138). Therefore, this paper applies two theoretical frameworks for explaining communication behaviors during the employment interview.

The main objective of this paper is to propose the usefulness of Uncertainty Reduction Theory (URT) and anticipatory socialization as alternative approaches to understanding and performing the interview process. Uncertainty Reduction Theory explains how two strangers gather information to increase predictability about each other's behavior (Berger & Calabrese, 1975). Anticipatory socialization describes the degree to which applicants prepare to occupy their position before entering the organization (Van Maanen, 1975). By observing the interview through both perspectives, interviewers and applicants can better understand the process and make adjustments in their communication behaviors. In order to meet this objective, Uncertainty Reduction Theory must be extended to a new area of study from its origin in interpersonal communication. However, the process of extending URT requires reexamination of some of its assumptions. Each of the seven URT axioms will be explained using interview research findings.

Understanding the employment interview in terms of uncertainty reduction theory has practical relevance. Ragan believes a "mutual and open sharing of both positive and negative information . . . results in greater job satisfaction and less job turnover, thus benefiting both the individual and the organization" (1983, p. 513). Tengler and Jablin agree that "each party has the opportunity to explore directly information germane to their respective employment decisions" (1983, p. 246). Current research studies show bias toward the organization by focusing on interviewers' questioning behaviors and have "generally ignored how applicants use questions in the interview to seek information" (Jablin & Miller, 1990, p. 78). Therefore, this paper looks at the interview process as a dynamic interactive event. Because the exchange of information can affect an applicant's future involvement with an organization, the employment interview should be considered as part of anticipatory socialization.

The first section of this literature review summarizes what is known about communication behaviors within the interview. A description of anticipatory socialization follows and how it relates to the employment interview. The third section examines uncertainty reduction theory in detail and shows how this interpersonal communication theory is useful for explaining interviewing behaviors. The final section offers suggestions for interviewers and applicants.

## COMMUNICATION BEHAVIORS IN THE INTERVIEW

### What is an Interview?

The lack of adequate definitions for "interview" can create inconsistent perceptions. Cohen and Etheredge define the interview as "an appraisal process in which the recruiter observes various applicant behaviors that prompt a referral decision" (1975 as cited in Goodall & Goodall, 1982, p. 116). This definition is questionable because it ignores the interaction and reciprocal nature between participants. The applicant also observes various behaviors to make decisions about the recruiter and organization (Jablin, 1985).

Jablin and Krone reflect a different orientation with their definition of "a formally structured communication event, in which each party largely follows role-prescribed behavior" (1987, p. 721). The second definition acknowledges interaction but assumes that all interviews have formal and standard procedures. Most interviewers are not trained in questioning techniques and therefore are not consistent with the type and sequence of questions (Jablin & Miller, 1990). Similarly, many applicants are not prepared for interviewers with differing styles (Posner, 1981).

In general, "the interview is typically considered a semi-structured, somewhat unreliable . . . form of two-way communication" (Jablin, 1987, p. 689). Two participants (interviewer and applicant) attempt to share information, match expectations, and influence perceptions of each other. The interview is an opportunity for both persons to reduce their uncertainty and to make decisions regarding the organization. Therefore, participants should share a common definition or purpose of the employment interview to reduce misconceptions and faulty expectations.

### What occurs in the interview?

> During the short time spent together, the interviewer must ascertain which one of the interviewees best fits the criteria established for the position by carefully observing and classifying statements made, questions asked, and by attributing meaning and importance to the candidates' verbal and nonverbal behavior. (Goodall & Goodall, 1982, p. 116)

Many people follow this traditional description; however, the employment interview also provides information to applicants of what their potential organization membership entails. Because of this dual nature, purposeful communication between both participants is critical (Jablin & McComb, 1984).

Jablin (1985) summarizes a number of generalizations about interpersonal communication during the employment interview (pp. 620-621). This information serves as later evidence to support how participants use communication to reduce uncertainty and to socialize members.

**Interview orientation.** The majority of interview studies have concentrated solely on exploring the communication perceptions and behaviors of interviewers versus applicants, and generally have failed to examine the two parties in dynamic interaction (Jablin & McComb, 1984). This research tradition may have been reinforced by inadequate definitions (mentioned earlier).

**Differing perceptions.** Applicants and interviewers tend to have differential perceptions of numerous communication behaviors such as talkativeness, listening, and questioning. Applicants perceive interviewers as high-status participants that structure the question and answer process. Interviewers believe applicants should anticipate likely questions, speak only in response to those questions, and generally acknowledge the status difference (Jablin & Krone, 1987, p. 721). If the applicant fails to meet these conversational expectations, the interviewer might attribute negative characteristics to the applicant (Herriot & Rothwell, 1983).

Cheatham and McLaughlin (1976) studied 188 placement center interviews to investigate the degree of difference between applicant and interviewer perceptions. Using post-interview questionnaires, the researchers found that applicants rated themselves and their interviewers significantly higher than interviewers' ratings of themselves or the applicants. The explanation could be due to applicant anxiety about the job, ingratiation, perceived status differences, or false feedback from the interviewer (Cheatham & McLaughlin, 1976, p. 13).

**Interviewer questions.** Generally, interviewers hold the floor of conversation longer than applicants (Cheatham & McLaughlin, 1976; Tengler & Jablin, 1983). During the 30 minutes, interviewers answer applicant questions, talk about themselves, or describe the job and organization (Babbitt & Jablin, 1985). Tengler and Jablin (1983) videotaped 49 placement center interviews and examined the relationship between questioning and interview outcomes. Interviewers typically use the "inverted funnel" sequence that limits applicant "talk time" during the opening minutes of the interview (Tengler & Jablin, 1983).

These interviewer behaviors are not desirable if the interview is to be a mutual search and exchange of information between two parties (Jablin & Miller, 1990). Springbett (1958) reports that interviewers make decisions about applicants within the first four to seven minutes. By restricting the amount of time applicants can describe themselves, interviewers are losing the opportunity to base their decisions on adequate information.

**Applicant questions.** Applicants ask interviewers closed-ended questions, singular in form, seek job-related information, and ask them only after interviewers provide the opportunity (Babbitt, 1983). Recently, researchers are questioning the effectiveness of this role-prescribed communication behavior (Babbitt & Jablin, 1985; Ragan, 1983; Shaw, 1983). Jablin and Krone believe that applicants may be viewed more favorably by interviewers if they act more like conversational participants than interrogated respondents (1987, p. 721). Tengler and Jablin (1983) support this in their findings of applicants who were offered second on-site interviews. These applicants spent less time in question-response interactions but more total time talking in their initial interviews than did applicants who were rejected.

**Nonverbal communication.** Applicants who display “high” levels of nonverbal immediacy (eye contact, smiling, posture, physical distance, body orientation) tend to be favored by interviewers (Einhorn, 1981; Imada & Hakel, 1977; McGovern & Tinsley, 1978; Tengler & Jablin, 1983). Interviewers should also be aware of their nonverbal communication. Applicants falsely believed they received the job when interviewers displayed high amounts of nonverbal immediacy (Cheatham & McLaughlin, 1976). Both participants should display reasonably high amounts of positive nonverbal behaviors; but should not use nonverbals to cloud their intentions (Berger, 1987).

**Applicant trust.** If interviewers are the only source of information, applicants do not particularly like or trust them and appear hesitant to accept job offers. However if interviewers are job incumbents and are not personnel representatives, they are perceived as presenting more realistic job information (Downs, 1969; Fisher, Ilgen, & Hoyer, 1979; Jablin, Tengler, & Teigen, 1985).

**Interview satisfaction.** Applicants' satisfaction with interviews are related to the quality and amount of information interviewers provide, how much interest interviewers show applicants, and how often interviewers ask open-ended questions and allow sufficient "talk time" (Karol, 1977; Tengler, 1982). These findings suggest that applicants are not content to be passive respondents to interrogation. They appreciate a conversational style that helps to reduce uncertainty for them and illustrates what to expect if they are accepted for employment.

**Perceptions of interviewers.** Applicants' outcome expectations and the likelihood of accepting job offers appears related to their perceptions of interviewers as "trustworthy, competent, composed, empathic, enthusiastic and well-organized communicators" (Alderfer & McCord, 1970; Fisher, Ilgen, & Hoyer, 1979).

**Perceptions of applicants.** Interviewers rate applicants higher if they receive favorable information about them prior to or during the interview (Herriot & Rothwell, 1983) and if applicants' discussion on topics nearly matches interviewers' expectations (Einhorn, 1981; Herriot & Rothwell, 1983; Tengler & Jablin, 1983). Interviewers frequently report applicant communication ability/competence as the critical factor in hiring decisions. This communication ability involves fluent speech, composure, appropriate content, and organized ideas (Hollandsworth, Kazelskis, Stevens, & Dressel, 1979).

To summarize this section, the interview is a dynamic interaction between two participants that have differing perceptions of the process and each other. Interviewers dominate "talk time" and applicants typically act as respondents. However, more successful applicants act as conversational participants. Interview satisfaction relates with nonverbal immediacy, trust, communication ability, and competence. From this review on interview communication behavior, "the interview is important not only as an interpersonal communication event, but because of the role it plays in communicating job/organizational expectations to potential employees" (Jablin, 1985, p. 621). The next section specifically describes how the employment interview acts as a form of anticipatory socialization since it serves as the applicant's first exposure to the organization.

## ANTICIPATORY ORGANIZATIONAL SOCIALIZATION

Before individuals enter organizations, they form sets of expectations and beliefs concerning how people communicate in occupations and work settings (Jablin, 1987). This "anticipatory socialization" process contains two phases: vocational (or occupational) and organizational (Jablin, 1985). Vocational socialization involves choosing a career (e.g., education, sales, manufacturing) while organizational socialization involves a particular company or institution within that career. "[I]t is almost always true that organizational entry follows occupational entry for those on their first full-time job" (Wanous, 1977, p. 602). This paper focuses only on organizational anticipatory socialization since the employment interview occurs within a specific work setting. Jablin claims that applicants build their expectations about specific jobs and organizations from a variety of sources: "(1) organizational literature (for example, job advertisements, annual reports, training brochures, job preview booklets) and (2) interpersonal interactions with other applicants, organizational interviewers, teachers, current employees, and the like" (1987, p. 685). The most frequent and significant source of informative job preview is the employment interview (Arvey & Campion, 1982; Jablin & McComb, 1984).

**How does Anticipatory Socialization Relate to Interviews?**

Several theorists consider the interview the applicant's first exposure to organizational socialization (Arvey & Campion, 1982; Jablin & McComb, 1984). Jablin (1987) suggests that the interview is a form of job preview because of its content and the amount of "talk time" participants use. Research describes the majority of interview content focusing on organizational issues (Keenen & Wedderburn, 1980; Taylor & Sniezek, 1984). Teigen (1983) claims that 38% of talk and 18% of topics are about organizational climate. These issues specifically involve job duties and responsibilities, coworker relations, pay and benefits, supervision methods, and advancement potential (Jablin, 1987). The amount of "talk time" is typically unequal with applicants speaking only about 10 minutes in an average 30 minute interview (Tengler & Jablin, 1983). Two possible explanations exist for this distribution disparity. Applicants learn to respect status differences by performing a passive role (Campion & Campion, 1987) and interviewers try to regulate applicant responses due to time constraints (Tengler & Jablin, 1983). In either case, participants understand and follow certain organizational rules.

The interview could sometimes be the first interaction between the supervisor and newcomer if the interviewer serves as a supervisor. The communication between supervisors and newcomers is critical for organizational socialization (Graen, 1976). By reducing uncertainty and clarifying perceptions, this new relationship can continue without disappointing either party. "Frequent and open communication with the supervisor can provide the newcomer with more opportunities to clarify concerns, ask questions, check perceptions, and become better acquainted with the organizational culture" (Falcione & Wilson, 1988, p. 157).

### Why is anticipatory socialization important in interviews?

**Improves supervisor and newcomer relations.** Initial positive relationships can begin when supervisors interview applicants. It is important for both participants in the interview to make informed attributions since applicant behaviors can affect supervisor attributions and vice versa (Jablin, 1982). "The exchanges between supervisors and newcomers can significantly influence the development of perceptions, expectations, rules, and appropriate behaviors within the organization" (Falcione & Wilson, 1988, p. 158). Therefore, the relationship between supervisor and newcomer can be a positive one after the initial interview meeting.

**Reduces inflated expectations.** Jablin and McComb criticize past research for failing to acknowledge that the interview is also setting initial job expectations for applicants, and is "therefore a significant factor in subsequent organizational assimilation processes" (1984, p. 152). Wanous (1980) believes applicants have unrealistic positive expectations about the organizations in which they seek employment. Cheatham and McLaughlin (1976) empirically support this claim. When these applicants are hired, they enter organizations with these inflated expectations (Wanous, 1980). The reason for this is due in part to interviewers only describing the positive features of organizational membership (Jablin, 1982; Wanous, 1977).

By perceiving the interview as an act of anticipatory socialization, the interviewer can provide a more realistic job preview. Popovich and Wanous compare the realistic job preview to a vaccination since "a small dose of organizational reality" can help deflate newcomer expectations (1982, p. 571). The applicant can begin employment with reasonable expectations of the organization and the supervisor can have a better understanding of the newcomer's abilities.

Applicants can also make better employment decisions based on the job preview. "The 'realistic information' hypothesis proposes that individuals recruited via sources which provide more accurate information will be able to self-select out of jobs which do not meet their needs" (Breaugh & Mann, 1984, p. 261). Therefore, applicants and interviewers can make faster and more effective employment decisions by reducing inflated positive expectations.

**Reduces employee turnover.** Jablin states "the more inflated job candidates' preentry expectations, the more difficult it usually is for them to meet these expectations once on the job" (1987, p. 687). Wanous (1980) continues the logic that ineffective entry procedures will lead to voluntary turnover. Unmet expectations not only increase turnover but reduce job satisfaction and commitment to the organization before employees leave (Porter & Steers, 1973). Again, if interviewers provide realistic information to applicants during the employment interview, these newcomers will have accurate expectations when they begin work. This should increase levels of job satisfaction and lower the rate of turnover (Wanous, 1980).

To summarize this section, the employment interview is a crucial part of anticipatory socialization that, in turn, is "critically important to organizational effectiveness" (Falcione & Wilson, 1988, p. 151). The benefits of providing a realistic job preview are: (1) the improvement of supervisor / newcomer relations, (2) the reduction of inflated expectations, and (3) the reduction of later employee turnover. The anticipatory socialization perspective requires participants to increase their efforts for mutual understanding and sharing accurate information. The next section examines how Uncertainty Reduction Theory (URT) is useful for achieving these goals.

## UNCERTAINTY REDUCTION THEORY

Another perspective for analyzing the interview is the theory of reducing uncertainty. An interpersonal communication theory posited by Berger and Calabrese (1975) has gained support for explaining socialization (Lester, 1986; Falcione & Wilson, 1988; Wilson, 1986). Researchers have extended Uncertainty Reduction Theory (URT) to explain aspects of established romantic relationships (Parks & Adelman, 1983), intercultural encounters (Gudykunst, Yang, & Nishida, 1985), and functions of mass communication (Blumer & Katz, 1974).

The situation of the employment interview relates well to socialization. Two strangers meet each other and a set of rules or norms determines how they communicate. One would assume that these strangers want to reduce their uncertainty or increase the predictability of each other's behaviors (Berger & Calabrese, 1975). "[C]ommunication provides information, cues, and knowledge which allow an individual to make predictions and reduce uncertainty about other individuals" (Falcione & Wilson, 1988, p. 156).

In the organizational environment, both interviewer and applicant are uncertain of each other and must follow a set of communication norms. The interviewer attempts to predict the work behavior of the applicant while the applicant tries to learn more about the organization and interviewer. Feldman (1976, 1981) claims that applicants who seek information during the anticipatory socialization phase (the job interview) will have a more accurate understanding of both the job and the organization. Therefore, "[u]ncertainty is not reduced for its own sake" (Berger, 1987, p. 41). URT may be helpful in explaining and suggesting particular communication behaviors.

Berger and Calabrese (1975) describe uncertainty in two terms: proactive and retroactive processes. Proactive methods help to "predict the most likely alternative actions the other person might take. . .[and make] predictions about the other before the other acts" (Berger & Calabrese, 1975, pp. 100-101). Retroactive methods help explain the other person's behavior after the fact.

Later studies identified more specific information-seeking strategies during nonwork interactions: passive, active, and interactive (Berger & Bradac, 1982; Berger & Kellermann, 1983; Jablin & Krone, 1987; Kellermann & Berger, 1984). Berger defines each according to the level of participation:

> Passive strategies are those in which the uncertainty reducer gathers information about a target through unobtrusive observation. Active strategies involve the observation of target's responses to manipulations of the interaction environment but no direct interaction between observers and targets. Also included in this category is the acquisition of information about a target from third-party sources. Finally, interactive strategies involve direct, face-to-face contact between the information seeker and the target. (Berger, 1987, p. 46)

These strategies can apply to work situations as well; however, not every type is appropriate. Interactive strategies are the norm for employment interviews. Interviewer and applicant usually sit face-to-face; although the telephone interview is becoming a viable recruiting tool. Both parties exchange information through a question-response format.

On the other hand, active strategies do not work well in the employment interview. It is unrealistic for an applicant to avoid direct interaction with the interviewer and simply observe him or her in the organizational environment. After the applicant receives the job, then he or she can ask others about the interviewer's behaviors or observe the interviewer within the environment.

However, some studies have described how applicants use passive strategies to gather information. Applicants observe the characteristics of interviewers and the perceptions of interviewers' preparation, personality, verbal fluency, sex, and age influence applicants' opinions. (Rogers & Sincoff, 1978; Schmitt and Coyle, 1976).

Berger and Calabrese (1975) propose seven axioms for Uncertainty Reduction Theory in order to specifically explain the initial entry stage of interpersonal interaction between strangers.

> **AXIOM 1: Given the high level of uncertainty present at the onset of the entry phase, as the amount of verbal communication between strangers increases, the level of uncertainty for each interactant in the relationship will decrease. As uncertainty is further reduced, the amount of verbal communication will increase. (Berger & Calabrese, 1975, pp. 101-102)**

When people interact for the first time, they usually ask numerous questions during the first few minutes (Berger, 1973; Calabrese, 1975; Kellermann & Berger, 1984). "Initial questions are generally concerned with background or biographic information; later questions are concerned with opinions, preferences, and interests" (Kellermann & Berger, 1984, p. 345). As more is known about each other, the two interactants can discuss more topics. This conversational style is very different in organizational communication.

As stated earlier, interviewers do not allow adequate "talk time" for applicants during the first few minutes of the employment interview (Tengler & Jablin, 1983). By not allowing feedback, the exchange of information could decrease during an average 30-minute interaction. Lalljee and Cook (1973) found that during interactions with two-way exchanges, the words per minute increased by over 9 minutes. In a similar study by Berger and Larimer (1974) interviewers did not allow feedback and exchanged words decreased by 4 minutes. This decrease of information exchange could maintain the high level of uncertainty for applicants. They could leave the interview with less informed perceptions of the job and organization. Therefore, if participants followed Axiom 1 and increased the amount of verbal communication (or balanced the amount of "talk time") between them, both parties could reduce their uncertainty. Applicants could have more informed perceptions of the organization and interviewers could make effective hiring decisions.

> **AXIOM 2: As nonverbal affiliative expressiveness increases, uncertainty levels will decrease in an initial interaction situation. In addition, decreases in uncertainty level will cause increases in nonverbal affiliative expressiveness. (Berger & Calabrese, 1975, p. 103)**

Mehrabian (1971) supports the link between uncertainty reduction and nonverbal expressiveness by describing significant positive correlations between variables of total statements per minute, amount of eye contact, positive verbal content, head and arm gestures per minute, and pleasant vocal expressions. Affiliative behavior (showing positive nonverbals) increases liking in both interviewers and applicants. One explanation for this might be that when a person feels more comfortable with another, he or she will display more positive nonverbal behaviors. Reducing uncertainty might relate to these increased feelings of comfort.

The outcomes of interviews show the effects of nonverbal communication. Applicants report more positive evaluations of the interviewer and organization when they perceive high affiliative expressiveness (Cheatham & McLaughlin, 1976). Interviewers favored applicants that also showed these positive nonverbal behaviors (Einhorn, 1981; Imada & Hakel, 1977; McGovern & Tinsley, 1978). Therefore, both participants should continue their display of nonverbal affiliative expressiveness without clouding their intentions.

> **AXIOM 3: High levels of uncertainty cause increases in information seeking behavior. As uncertainty levels decline, information seeking behavior decreases. (Berger & Calabrese, 1975, p. 103)**

During the first few moments of interaction, information seeking behavior involves asking for and giving biographical and demographic information. If similarities exist, the participants might discuss more intimate issues (Berger & Calabrese, 1975). In addition, "similarities and dissimilarities in background characteristics might lead to the development of predictions of similarity or dissimilarity on more crucial attitudinal issues" (Berger & Calabrese, 1975, p. 103).

During the first few moments of the employment interview, an interviewer will ask informal questions or "make small talk" that involves biographical or demographic information. Smart (1989) suggests that applicants should talk more in the opening moments to relax, thereby increasing genuineness. As more commonality exists between the participants, more meaningful discussions (information exchange) can occur.

> **AXIOM 4: High levels of uncertainty in a relationship cause decreases in the intimacy level of communication content. Low levels of uncertainty produce high levels of intimacy. (Berger & Calabrese, 1975, p. 103)**

Altman and Taylor (1973) suggest that as an interpersonal relationship becomes more rewarding and less costly, persons will become more intimate. Berger (1973) describes that the highest amount of demographic (less intimate) information is exchanged during the first minute of interaction. Then demographic information decreases as attitudinal (more intimate) information increases.

Within the employment interview, the risk is much higher for self-disclosure. Applicants rate interviewers for trustworthiness and are hesitant to trust information from personnel representatives (Fisher, Ilgen, & Hoyer, 1979). Shaw (1983) describes applicants are resistant to assert power, so they act as passive respondents. If both interview participants are strangers, a high level of uncertainty exists. The relationship could be costly if the applicant reveals too much information and loses a job offer. Thus, participants maintain low levels of intimacy during employment interviews.

> **AXIOM 5: High levels of uncertainty produce high rates of reciprocity. Low levels of uncertainty produce low reciprocity rates. (Berger & Calabrese, 1975, p. 105)**

Berger and Calabrese expect persons with mutual uncertainty to ask for and receive information at the same exchange rate. "In this way, no one interactant in the system would be able to gain information power over the other" (Berger & Calabrese, 1975, p. 105). In organizational settings, power and status differences must be recognized. Interviewers may talk more in interviews to establish power through the imbalance of information (Campion & Campion, 1987). Another reason could be simply that the interviewer must adhere to time constraints (Tengler & Jablin, 1983). Applicants acknowledge power occurs when they ask questions only when the interviewers provide the opportunity. These questions are usually simple, closed-ended, and singular in form (Babbitt, 1983). It would be difficult to suggest that the applicant should ignore power differences in the interview; but a more balanced exchange would have benefits for both applicant and interviewer.

> **AXIOM 6: Similarities between persons reduce uncertainty, while dissimilarities produce increases in uncertainty. (Berger & Calabrese, 1975, p. 106)**

If similarities exist, the participants might discuss more intimate issues and develop predictions of similarity on attitudinal issues (Berger & Calabrese, 1975). Therefore participants reduce uncertainty. Interviewers rate applicants higher if they receive favorable information about them during the interview and if the discussion of topics nearly matches interviewers' expectations (Einhorn, 1981; Herriot & Rothwell, 1983; Tengler & Jablin, 1983). This leads to Axiom 7 that proposes increased liking due to low uncertainty.

> **AXIOM 7: Increases in uncertainty level produce decreases in liking; decreases in uncertainty level produce increases in liking. (Berger & Calabrese, 1975, p. 107)**

In a study of applicants who received second interviews, Tengler and Jablin (1983) found an increase in positive relationships between openness of interviewer questions and duration of applicant response. In other words, the interview resembled more of a conversation because of a more balanced exchange of information. When an applicant receives a second interview, the probability of getting the job increases. For interviewers, as more is known about an applicant, the level of liking might increase as well as the possibility of hiring the applicant. For applicants, as more is known about the interviewer, the level of trust might increase as well as the possibility of accepting the job offer.

In summarizing these axioms, Berger and Calabrese (1975) assume uncertainty is a function of the overall amount of communication. However, communication content and source are just as important. Without accurate information, both the interviewer and applicant create misperceptions of each other. Wilson (1984) suggests that information should be shared informally as well as formally. "While both formal and informal information can help to reduce uncertainty, formal information may be less helpful, in that formal information tends to be normative (what should be) while informal information tends to be descriptive (what actually is)" (Falcione & Wilson, 1988, p. 157). This refers back to the realistic job preview in which accurate information can lessen inflated expectations. Uncertainty Reduction Theory serves as a useful, sometimes controversial, approach to understanding behavior in the employment interview.

## RECOMMENDATIONS FOR INTERVIEWING

To move beyond reviewing employment interview behaviors, this paper offers suggestions for interviewers and applicants. Both participants should balance their exchange of accurate information since the interview is a part of the anticipatory socialization process. By applying URT axioms, specific behaviors are recommended:

- Allow adequate "talk time" for both parties to ask questions or talk during the first few minutes of the interview.
- Show high affiliative nonverbal expressiveness that is genuinely positive.
- Engage in "small talk" for biographical or demographic information from both participants.
- Maintain a moderate level of self-disclosure to build trust.
- Establish a conversational interaction rather than a question-response interrogation.
- Seek to reduce uncertainty and find similarities between the participants.

## CONCLUSION

Modifications are needed to improve the practice of interviewing. Researchers and practitioners are unknowingly distributing information that creates misperceptions and high expectations that could lead to disappointment or later turnover. Communication principles should guide research on interview behaviors. This paper provides two theoretical frameworks for explaining and suggesting such behaviors.

The responsibility for transforming the current interview process does not exist only with employers and applicants. Educators and researchers must begin to change perceptions. Then interview participants must challenge well-established practices. Uncertainty Reduction Theory and anticipatory socialization serve as useful alternative approaches to the current norms. More research should focus on theoretical as well as empirical evidence. Only by critical examination of existing models and assumptions will participants improve the effectiveness of the employment interview.

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